LAWS

OF

AMERICAN WHIST.

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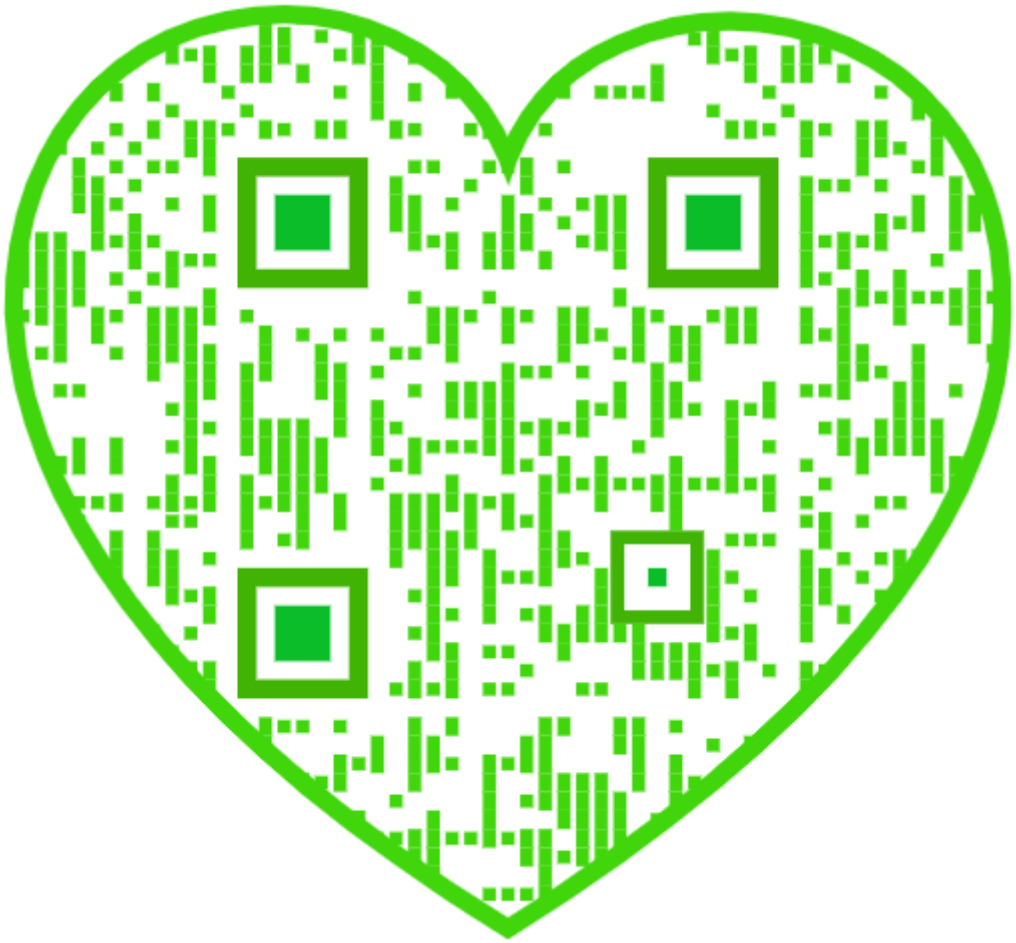

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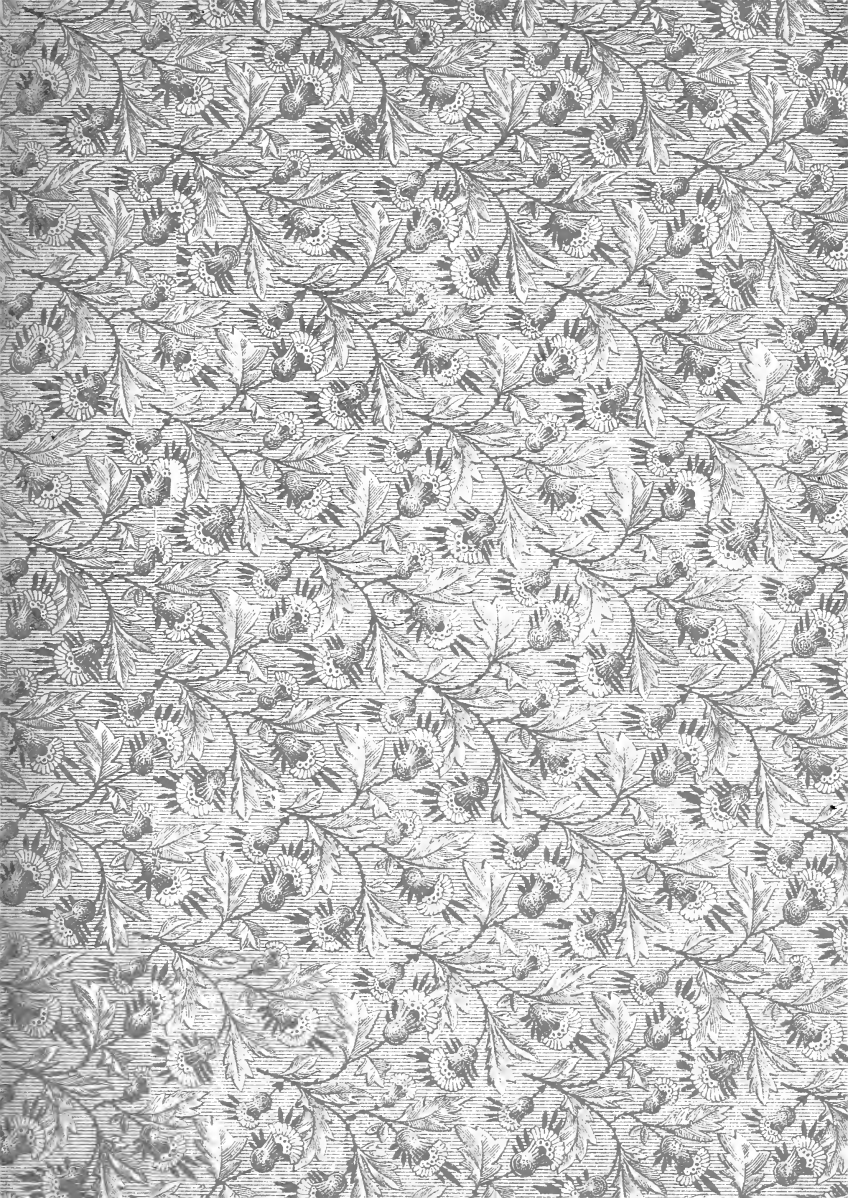

(For the American or English Game.)

WHIST SCORE CARD.

John Doe & Richard Roe } RED. vs. Geo. Smith & Wm Clarke } BLUE.

31st Sept. 1890

A. B. 19 Points.

Y. Z. 15 Points.

Players.	SCORES.									GAMES. A. B.	GAMES. Y. Z.	POINTS. A. B.	POINTS. Y. Z.	TOTALS. A. B.	TOTALS. Y. Z
A. B.	1	—	2	1	—	4				1		8			
Y. Z.	—	3	—	—	1	—					—		4		
A. B.	—	—	2	—	1	—				—		3			
Y. Z.	2	1	—	3	—	1					1		7		
A. B.	2	—	—	2	—	1	3			1		8		19	
Y. Z.	—	1	1	—	2	—	—				—		4		15
A. B.															
Y. Z.															
A. B.															
Y. Z.															
A. B.															
Y. Z.															
A. B.															
Y. Z.															
A. B.															
Y. Z.															
A. B.															
Y. Z.															
A. B.															
Y. Z.															

(Improved Form)

LAWS

OF

AMERICAN WHIST.

REVISED AND CORRECTED.

CHICAGO:
BARNARD & GUNTHORP, PRINTERS.
1890.

PREFACE.

The laws of American Whist are yet to be written, and established by the approval of the Clubs and whist players generally.

To present in a handy form the Rules by which the game has hitherto been mostly governed, with such emendations and material additions as the experience of many judicious persons has shown to be necessary or desirable; to invite other whist players to co-operate in constructing a Code of Laws which shall be clear, concise, complete, and satisfactory as a standard authority on the game in future—these are the objects of this publication.

No Code worthy the name yet exists. Ten years ago an attempt was made by a Boston expert to foist upon the public, as established laws of American Whist, a set of Rules, some fifteen in number, which, great as was the want of something of the sort, were too ill digested, imperfect, and impracticable to meet with favor in Whist Circles. Disgusted with the bad writing and 'snarling temper of a presumptuous braggart,' it is no wonder that our new school failed to accord to his work the little consideration it really merited, and that they were driven either to reform and continue the old game, accept-

ing its laws and decisions, or to modify and adapt to the new game as best they could, the comprehensive and elaborated codes of Europe which, although inapplicable in many respects to American Whist, did nevertheless represent what may be called the Common Law of Whist, upon whose principles the statutes of our own Cis-Atlantic game must of necessity be founded.

The absence of any agreed standard or concert of action among players of our improved game naturally occasioned a lack of uniformity; with this consequence; that embarrassing varieties of usage have arisen, and obtain even now among our Whist Clubs and Circles throughout the country.

We think the time is come when it is possible, perhaps easy, to secure that agreement and uniformity which are so desirable through the action of a *Congress*, to be composed of representatives from the leading Clubs of the principal cities of the United States, which might compile and report a code, to be submitted for trial, and adopted if approved.

The following pages are a contribution toward that end. Meanwhile they may supply a present want.

The Laws as here given are familiar in substance to all players. The language of "Cavendish" and even of "G. W. P." has been conserved where possible. All accessible Codes have been consulted, from

the first 18 Laws of Hoyle down to the last 85 of Mr. Henry Jones. From them much more might be borrowed; but of little value, and rare use. Herein nothing essential has been omitted; nothing superfluous admitted. The few changes in our rules which are proposed will commend themselves to the judgment of those who think that laws ought not to be on the statute book which are not and cannot be obeyed or enforced. (See L. 8.) Some points may be debatable, but all have been well considered. It is hopefully believed that this little digest cannot fail to be found useful,—until a better shall appear.

* * *

J. B. L.

Laws of American Whist.

1. Four persons out of any number, either by agreement or by cutting or drawing lower cards than other candidates, form a table. These four may agree, or cut to decide, who shall be partners. In cutting the ace is low; and the two highest play against the two lowest.

2. The first dealer is that player of the four who has cut or drawn the lowest card. The player on his left shuffles the pack chosen by the dealer; who passes the pack to the player on his right who then cuts, not leaving fewer than four cards in either packet, and placing the cut nearest the centre of the table. The under card is the trump card, which must not be known until turned. If, when

cutting, any card be exposed, the pack must be cut again.

3. While the dealer is dealing, his partner shuffles the other pack,* and places it at the left hand of his own right-hand opponent, who is next to deal. The pack may be shuffled by any or all the other players; and by the dealer last.

4. It is a mis-deal and the deal is lost if thirteen cards, one at a time in regular rotation beginning at the dealer's left, be not separately placed before each player; or if the dealer count the cards on the table or those undealt in his hand; or if the last card be not turned up at the dealer's right hand. Should a card be exposed in dealing, or faced in the pack, a new deal may be demanded by opponents.

5. Until the trump card is turned, the cards must not be gathered nor touched except by the dealer. If this be done,

*Two packs of cards, of different colors, are generally used.

and a mis-deal be made, the dealer deals again.

6. The trump card shall remain upon the table at the right hand of the dealer until three players have played; and shall be taken into hand before the completion of the second round.

7. Each player upon taking up his cards should count them. If he have not exactly thirteen he must report the mistake before he plays a card. If at the close of a hand a player is known to have held more or less than thirteen cards, his side loses a point. If any player has fourteen, it is a mis-deal, even though the hand has been partly played out. If less than thirteen, and the other players have their proper number, search must be made for the missing card, and, if found, (in the other pack, on the floor, or elsewhere,) the player to whom it belongs is liable for any revoke he may have made in the suit for want of it.*

* Law 26, New Cavendish. Hoyle, all editions. Universal law. But see Am. Whist Illus., L. 7.

8. No conversation is permitted during the play of the hand. Good whist demands silence. Talking must cease when the first card is led, and silence must continue until the last card is played (1): *Except*, that a player may—

(*a.*) Name an exposed card;
(*b.*) Claim a trick wrongly appropriated;
(*c.*) Call attention to an offense or irregularity that could not be proven when the hand were played out;
(*d.*) Ask 'what are trumps'; (?)
(*e.*) Require cards to be placed, or partners' drawn; (?)
(*f.*) Ask 'have you none of the suit, partner' (?);

without violating the law of silence.

(1.) Surely speech is allowable under circumstances indicated in the law as here given. The questions "Who dealt?" "Is there not a revoke?" "Shall I name the penalty?" and others, are also allowed in most of the Parisian and London clubs. To prohibit all these sometimes necessary questions, as has been attempted lately among us, makes the game (me judice) not better, but only more difficult and embarrassing. Haud inexpertus loquor. Most grotesque and ludicrous it is to see four players,

inexperienced in these novel restrictions, convulsed in struggling to keep the law of absolute silence in some exigency of the game which demands prompt speech; such as the right to a trick, or a lead. Their dumb show—as of deaf mutes—generally ends in their giving it up, breaking down, and—exploding all together.

Silence is golden, but it works best with some alloy. It is a weak affectation in its ultra advocates to pretend that *their* play requires a mental concentration so complete, and calculations so profound, as not to admit of the interjection of a word proper to the business of the game. The best apology that could be made for these extremists would be the plea that they aim above the mark in in order to hit the mark.

In Clubs where the "rigor of this law" has not yet been formally relaxed, some relief is obtained under the following by-law; "Penalties for violations of the law of silence may, for justifying reasons, be remitted, on appeal, by the Whist Committee."

Ed.

9. No intimation shall be given in any way as to the constitution of the player's hand, nor manifestation made by word, look, or act, of approval or disapproval of the play. No card shall be drawn from

the hand until needed to play in turn, nor played with an emphasis that calls attention to its value.*

10. A player may move the cards on the table so as to see them all before playing, and may direct his partner to draw his card;† but a player who points out his card, or says 'this is mine,' without being asked, is subject to penalty.

11. Every trick completed must be gathered before the next lead is made. No trick shall be examined after being gathered and turned.

12. Exposed cards (1) are cards which, whether fallen on table, played in error, or held in hand, may be seen by partner, (2) and convey to him information. The penalty is one point for each card. But cards dropped on the floor or held in hand so as to be seen by the adversaries only, are not liable to penalty. (3.)

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* Lex non scripta, until now.

† "Each person ought to lay his card before him. After he has done so, if either of the adverse party mix their cards with his, his partner is entitled to demand each person to lay his card before him; but not to enquire who played any particular card." Hoyle, Edits. 1755-79-86, et seq.

(1.) Under existing American Rules the penalty for exposed cards is much less severe and effective than under the English code. Under our rules the loss of only one point for exposure may be more than compensated by the gain of tricks won through the information conveyed to partner by the card; whereas, under Short Whist rules, the punishment of having a card or suit "called" by the adversaries is a strong prudential check to carelessness in play. *Ed.*

(5.) A different decision was given by "Cavendish" and James Clay, in the famous case of 'the lowered hand,' which provoked an indignant controversy between whist authorities all over the world. This decision, however, was forced upon them in interpreting strictly the imperfect language of the laws relating to exposure in the P. & A. code. Mr. Jones' argument is ingenious; but his conclusion seems 'monstrous' to those who look behind the law at the reason of the law,—which is here recognized. *Ed.*

(3.) Likewise at the end of a hand, cards shown, or several played together, provided they are all winning cards, are not (technically) "exposed;" because, being sure tricks, no unfair advantage can be gained by their exhibition. It is better, however, in order to avoid confusion, and for the discovery of revokes, regularly to play the hands out. See Hoyle, law 18, Edit. 1755, *et seq.* *Ed.*

13. If a player plays out of turn, or a card of a wrong suit, or throws on the table two or more cards at once, or shows any card unless in playing it, he suffers the penalty of Law 18, for each card named.

14. If a player lead out of turn, and all have followed, the trick holds good. The error can be corrected only before the fourth hand has played. Then, the cards may be withdrawn, and the leader alone pays penalty.

15. If a player deal out of turn, or with the adversaries' pack, he may be stopped before the trump card is turned up. After it is turned, the game must proceed as though no mistake had been made.

16. The game consists of seven points (reckoned by tricks and penalties), or as many more as may be made by the hand in which seven is reached. Each trick beyond six made by either side in

the play of the hand counts one point. The rubber is two games won out of three played, or two games consecutively won, by the same side.

17. Scores are kept in games, rubbers and points. The score of the hand must be called while the cards are in trick-packets; and the score of the game should be called before the cards are cut for the next deal. The cards are played for all the points that can be made, and every hand should be played out unless—the game being resigned by the losers—the cards are thrown down by one or both of them. Then, for each card in any one hand, a point is taken and scored by the winners, as for a trick made.

18. The penalty for the violation of any law (except that of revoke) is the forfeit of one point; to be deducted from the score of the offenders or added to the score of the adversaries, as they, upon consultation, or either of them by consent

of the other, shall elect. A penalty cannot be taken during the play, but must be claimed and scored before the cards are cut for the next deal. Penalties must always be enforced, and should be gracefully submitted to.

19. A revoke is the play of a card of a different suit while holding a card of the suit led. A revoke is complete when the trick has been turned and quitted, or when the revoking player or his partner has led or played to the following trick.

But if the player renouncing a suit discover and correct his mistake before the trick is quitted, he suffers only the penalty of Law 18; and if, in the meantime, other cards have been played, any or all of them can be recalled, without penalty.

20. The penalty for a revoke is either three tricks taken from the offending party, or three points taken from their score, or three added to their adversaries'

score, at adversaries' option. The revoke is proved by the claimants if need be by examination of the tricks at the close of the hand. This penalty is scored prior to scoring the tricks made; and no score that wins the game can be made by the revoking party.

PROPOSED NEW LAW: The partner of a player who has led out of turn any suit, trumps for instance, shall not lead that suit to him at his *first* opportunity.

ADVICE TO STUDENTS.

For instruction in the Theory and Practice of Whist there is no reading comparable to the books of 'Cavendish,' Pole and Proctor. On disputed cases Judge McIntosh's "Portland Rules, with Decisions thereunder" (Utica, New York, 1888), should be consulted. On what is peculiar to the American game "G. W. P." is the only known authority. The Principles of whist are best explained and enforced by the English writers on Short Whist, and the study of them is strongly recommended as the best preparation for the acquisition of the "advanced" American game. *Ed.*

DIFFICULT POSITION.—A and B against Y and Z.—The trumps were all out, on invitation of A, who after six rounds remained with the lead and seven clubs, viz: ace, knave, ten, seven and three small. A led 7 c.; Y, 5 c.; B, K'g; Z, 8. Then B returned the 4 c.; Z, 9; leaving A to play, against the queen alone. Its position was uncertain. It could not be with B; and the chances seemed equal that it might be on either side.

A, to secure a trick, declines to finesse, and plays the ace; but,—the queen being with Z—he makes no more in the suit. Had the Q. been with Y, or the ten finessed against Z, five tricks more would have been made by A.

Query, was A's play correct?

Most players who have not read, or read the books on American Whist alone, decide that A did right to play ace, and secure a trick, because the chance was even that the queen lay to the left of him. Those, however, who have learned to apply in practice the doctrine of probabilities as exhibited in "The Philosophy of Whist," find a more satisfactory solution of the problem by inquiring 'what is the probable distribution of the six clubs not in A's hand'?

Y has played one; B, two; Z, two; and A plays ace on the assumption that Y also has received two clubs.

But the real chance of the six cards being dealt into three twos is only about one-seventh (1/7) of all the possible ways of distributing the six. In other words, the chances are nearly six to one against it. See Pole's Phil. Whist, Ch. 8.

Ed.

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